

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

WALT WHITMAN.

LEAVES OF GRASS. 12mo, pp. 382. James R. Osgood & Co.

After the dilettante indelicacies of William H. Mallock and Oscar Wilde, we are presented with the slop-humors of Walt Whitman. The celebrity of this phenomenal poet bears a curious disproportion to the circulation of his writings. Until now, it cannot be said that his verse have ever been published at all. They have been printed irregularly and read behind the door. They have been vaunted extravagantly by a band of extravagant disciples; and the possessors of the books have kept them locked up from the family. Some have valued them for the "barbaric yawp," which seems to them the note of a new, vigorous, democratic, American school of literature; some for the fragments of real poetry floating in the turbid mass; some for the nastiness and animal insensibility to shame which entitle a great many of the poems to a dubious reputation as curiosities. Now that they are thrust into our faces at the book stalls there must be a reexamination of the myth of the Good Gray Poet. It seems to us that there is no need at this day to consider Mr. Whitman's claims to the immortality of genius. That he is a poet most of us frankly admit. His merits have been set forth many times, and at great length, and if the world has erred materially in its judgment of them the error has been a lazy and unquestioning acquiescence in some of the extreme demands of his votive-spirited partisans. The chief question raised by this publication is whether anybody—even a poet—ought to take off his trousers in the market-place. Of late years we believe that Mr. Whitman has not chosen to be so shocking as he was when he had his notoriety to make, and many of his admirers—the rational ones—hoped that the "Leaves of Grass" would be weeded before he set them out again. But this has not been done; and indeed Mr. Whitman could hardly do it without falsifying the first principle of his philosophy, which is a belief in his own perfection, and the second principle, which is a belief in the preposterousness of fifth, "Divine am I," he cries. "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from. The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer. This head more than churches, Bibles and all the creeds." He knows that he is "angust." He does not care for anybody's opinion. He is Walt Whitman, a known of Manhattan the son, turbulent, fleshly, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding. No sentimental, no stander above men and women or apart from them. No more modest than immodest.

There is nothing in the universe better than Walt Whitman. That is the burden of the "Song of Myself" which fills fifty pages of the present volume: I date on myself, there is that lot of me and all so insidious. Nothing is obscene or indecent to him. It is his mission to shout the forbidden voices, to tear the veil off everything, to clarify and transfigure all that is dirty and vile, to proclaim that garbage is just as good as meat if you are only lusty enough to think so. His immorality is free from glamor of every sort. Neither amatory sentiment nor susceptibility to physical beauty appears to have anything to do with it. It is entirely bestial; and in this respect we know of nothing in literature which can be compared with it. Walt Whitman, despising what he calls conventionalism, and vaunting the athletic democracy, asks to be accepted as the master of a new poetical school, fresh, free, stalwart, "immaculate in passion, pulse and power," the embodiment of the spirit of vigorous America. But the gross materialism of his verses represents art in its last degradation rather than its rude infancy.

Mr. Oliver Johnson has prepared a new, revised and enlarged edition of his notable work on "William Lloyd Garrison and His Times." Originally undertaken as a series of papers for the columns of THE TRIBUNE, these sketches of the Anti-Slavery movement, by one who had taken an active and honorable part in it, were afterward collected into a volume sold by subscription; and having enjoyed a large circulation through that agency, the book is now placed in the regular trade with the imprint of Houghton, Mifflin & Co. The new matter supplied by Mr. Johnson comprises a preface and a supplementary chapter, in both which, but especially in the latter, he deals vigorously with certain criticisms. It was inevitable that the work should provoke controversy, and, as our readers know, Mr. Johnson did not shrink from it. The accuracy of his statements, as well as the substantial justice of his spirit, may be considered well established. The present vindication is perhaps unnecessary, but it is highly interesting, and it makes a substantial addition to the value of a history which has earned an enduring place.

Two somewhat remarkable memorials of the general sorrow aroused by the death of President Garfield have just issued from the press. One is a selection of "Tributes from Over Seas" (Boston: A. Williams & Co.), consisting of extracts from the foreign press, expressions of sympathy by official personages and distinguished private individuals, etc., etc. The other, entitled "Gems of Poetry and Song on James A. Garfield" (Columbus: J. C. McChesney & Co.), includes tributes in verse from Dr. Holmes, Longfellow, Miss Muloch, J. G. Whittier, A. B. Alcott, G. P. Lathrop, Julia Ward Howe, John Boyle O'Reilly, Paul H. Hayne, Joaquin Miller, T. B. Aldrich, Dr. Holland, Walt Whitman and poets of less note.

LITERARY NOTES.

The new edition of Mr. James T. Fields's "Yesterday with Authors" (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.) is a very handsome gilt-edged volume, adorned with ten portraits on steel, and bound in a novel and beautiful style. It is pleasant to have so good a book in so becoming a dress. These personal recollections are among the best papers of their kind. They are genial, lively, vivid, full of anecdote and characteristic incident, and the narrator never makes free with matters that ought to be private.

Some remarkable data for the history of Shelley's life have lately been discovered.

The ways of authors are apt to be peculiar. He who could work only in court dress and lace ruffles is balanced by one of the busiest writers of the day, who, though scrupulous as to dress when abroad, wears in his study a coat he first used at Oxford nearly twenty years ago the sleeves of which are conspicuous by their absence.

The Japanese have a pretty little gift for literary piracy. The copyright law of China is very strict, the work of a man's brain being as much his personal possession as is his purse. The Japanese, however, with airy audacity, reprint whatever Chinese works they please, and not content with selling them in Japan, send them to China and calmly sell them there at half the original cost. Many important European books are translated or adapted in Japan.

A sceler of even more goy tastes than Miss Bradion has arisen in England. Mr. C. H. Ross, in soaring emulation of this lady's penitential modeling with Sir Walter Scott, has undertaken to favor the public with maimed and condemned editions of the works of Dickens, Charles Lever, Lord Lytton and other famous authors. His first venture is a sixteen-page novella wherein is told "The Story of Oliver Twist," by Charles Dickens." Mr. Ross publishes an address to his readers in which he exhibits a most reverent regard for his author's text—a regard which reminds a critic of Belphégor's recipe for scraping a carrot. This recipe is said to be of so tender and agreeable a character that if the carrot were a thing of life the scraping would be a positive pleasure.

Some rather extraordinary opinions concerning the author of "Red Cotton Nightcap Country" were indulged in by the speakers at the first meeting, in London, of the newly formed Browning Society. One of them declared that Mr. Browning was preeminently the greatest Christian poet England had had, and that the Church had never known its greatest sons. He thought that the poet had shown the profoundest knowledge of men and things of any writer who had arisen since Shakespeare. Mr. Furnival, who presided, uttered the

gentle assertion that Mr. Browning's style was not so difficult to be understood as had been represented. The Echo suggests that the members of the society undertake to interpret some of Mr. Browning's poems, and imagines that the interpretations would be as varied as those of the Professor of Signs and his French visitor, one of whom took three fingers and a fist to represent the mystery of the Trinity, and the other to represent the truth that one Englishman was as good as three Frenchmen.

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